

VOLUNTEER INCENTIVES IN ALASKAN FIRE DEPARTMENTS

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer fire departments across the country are finding it more difficult to retain experienced responders. In Alaska, the problem of volunteer retention is being addressed by a myriad of methods with varying degrees of success.

The purpose of this research project was to identify volunteer incentive programs used by other departments that could be useful in Homer.

This study utilized descriptive research methodology to answer the following questions:

1. What is a volunteer incentive program?
2. What are the necessary components of a volunteer incentive program?
3. What types or kinds of incentives do other Alaska departments use?

A survey was conducted of 238 volunteer departments in Alaska. Of those, a total of 68 were returned, for a 29% return rate. This rate, though low, was representative of the incentive types and options offered to some 1,759 volunteer emergency service responders from across Alaska.

The findings revealed that the most frequent incentive offered was paid training (94%), followed by the use of informal rewards (72%), and facility usage (67%). Other incentives listed on the questionnaire received ratings ranging from 58% (uniforms), down to less than 1% (retirement/pension plans).

In the opinion section of the survey, there was no clear answer to the question of whether incentives allowed departments to keep volunteers longer (47% reporting “yes”, and 53% reporting “no”). In contrast, when asked whether volunteer incentives, or the

lack of, had impacted operations a vast majority (63%) replied “yes”, compared to only 37% that responded “no”.

The recommendations of the research were to query each member of the Homer Volunteer Fire Department with regards to the importance they place on the various incentive possibilities. The administration could then build an incentive program based upon that input. It was also recommended that existing programs be expanded to include paid health and retirement benefits.

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INTRODUCTION

The Homer, Alaska Volunteer Fire Department has varied emergency service responsibilities, providing structural and wildland firefighting, marine firefighting within the Homer Port and Harbor, airport rescue and firefighting at the Homer Airport and area wide emergency medical services. The fire department is made up of volunteers supported by a paid staff of four. While many of the department members have been active participants in the service for many years, the fire department is seeking to develop adequate incentives to retain a sufficient number of qualified and experienced members to meet its staffing needs.

The purpose of this research project was to identify volunteer incentive programs used by other departments that could be useful in Homer. The descriptive research method was utilized to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is a volunteer incentive program?
- 2) What are the necessary components of a volunteer incentive program?
- 3) What types or kinds of incentives do other Alaska departments use?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Homer Volunteer Fire Department-

Homer is located in southcentral Alaska, some 225-road miles south of Anchorage, on the southwestern tip of the Kenai Peninsula. The year-round population of Homer is slightly over 4,000, with an additional 4,000 – 5,000 residents located in the surrounding area. This population base more than doubles during the peak tourist months of summer (July and August), concentrated on a five-mile “spit” of land projecting into scenic Kachemak Bay.

The Homer Volunteer Fire Department (HVFD) response area covers some 25 square miles, including Homer and Kachemak City, and the unincorporated areas of the Kenai Peninsula Borough within the response boundaries. The fire department is funded through the Operating Budget of the City of Homer and a small contract fee collected from Kachemak City. There are an average of 40 volunteer responders supported by the paid staff: Fire Chief, Fire Assistant Chief, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Assistant Chief and a Departmental Services Coordinator. The department averages 385 emergency responses per year, 75% of which are medically related.

Staffing Considerations -

Due to the economics of the community, many of the volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel must take “Leaves of Absence” during the corresponding peak response time, summer. Due to these and other commitments of available staff, it often becomes necessary to recruit new members to supplement the dwindling human resources of the department. With about 40 members the department has met with some difficulty in the delivery of emergency services during certain times of the year. Snook and Olsen (1989) state “Keep in mind that approximately one-third of the total number of active volunteers will show up to provide the needed services at

any given time” (p. 30). With this in mind, as well as the seasonal losses encountered each year by HVFD, it is important for the organization to retain as many of its trained and experienced members as possible.

Financial Considerations -

The costs associated with the training of a new recruit are substantially higher than maintaining a current responder. In a cost analysis of the training budget of the Homer Volunteer Fire Department it was determined that over two-thirds of the total training budget was allocated to replacing experienced responders with new recruits. It is much more cost effective to provide annual refreshers and monthly drills to trained and experienced members (48-hours) than to conduct full training programs for raw recruits (200+ hours).

There are other cost impacts as well. New employee/volunteer medical screening, vaccinations and safety equipment issued (personal protective equipment) can account for a substantial portion of small departments operating budget.

Relationship to Executive Development Course-

There are many subject areas within the Executive Development Course where volunteer incentives relate. In the Executive Development Course, the student learned that one of the cornerstones of any fire organization is “Teamwork”. That concept can be no less important in the volunteer organization, where the “team” may be one of the principal motivating factors that determine ones longevity within a department. Volunteer retention is directly tied to the members feeling as though they are part of a team, whether it is providing fire protection or emergency medical services.

Another obvious tie-in to the Executive Development course and this applied research project is the topic of “Research”. Research, to broaden the body of knowledge of the fire

service, must be useful and pertinent to the organizational structure. Likewise, the section on “Problem Solving” assisted in the development of this research project. There was a problem identified (volunteer retention) and research will assist in determining the need and usefulness of incentives as well as which incentives may work for this organization.

Finally, Perkins and Benoit (1996) state “In most cases, departments that have a good record of retaining members, and strong leadership are unlikely to have a serious recruitment problem” (p. 131). This concept of leadership is discussed in Unit 5: Following and Leading of the Executive Development Course. Thus leadership, especially strong leadership, coupled with the right incentives may produce for HVFD the strategy necessary to meet present and projected volunteer staffing goals of the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Retention/Incentive Problem

With relatively few exceptions, fire services in Alaska are provided by volunteer organizations. Likewise, only about 6% of the over 30,000 fire departments in the United States are fully paid or so called “career” departments (Marinucci, 1995). Whether full volunteer, combination, or full paid, every department must first recruit and then retain participatory members. Unlike paid departments, volunteer organizations rely on incentives other than salaries and wages as the primary motivational resource to retain trained and experienced responders. Whatever the reason: the so called “Graying of America” (the increasing ratio of older versus younger Americans attributed to the “Baby Boom” of the late 1940’s and 1950’s), more competition from the private sector, or just plain apathy, the need for volunteers is greater than the supply. Some areas of the country have experienced up to a fifty- percent increase in the number of responses while seeing a twenty- percent decrease in the number of volunteers (Buckman, July 1, 1998).

Although a certain amount of turnover is inevitable, “regardless of whether the organization is a business, a university, a church, or a fire department, recruitment is an open file” (Perkins & Benoit, 1996, p. 130), through the effective use of incentives most departments can retain those most valuable of resources, the volunteer responder. Snook and Olsen (1989) assert, “Incentive programs encourage individuals to continue volunteering on a long term basis” (p. 235). The people of the Homer community have traditionally been younger and transient, moving with employment opportunities and life style changes. With economics based upon the fishing and tourist industries, Homer has long endured a “boom or bust” financial climate. Changes in the fishing industry have resulted in lost jobs and opportunities for a large segment of

the population. While there has been an ongoing and steady transition from commercial fishing to sport/guided fishing and tourism, Homer still has no large industry/manufacturing base from which to form a strong, solid membership pool.

Another problem associated with retaining the emergency service volunteer is the amount of competing forces vying for the potential volunteer's time. These have been identified as: lack of time, family responsibilities, other civic organizations, sports activities, TV, weather, religion, work/job, and school (Snook and Olsen, 1989). Volunteer fire departments must first recruit from a finite pool of prospective volunteers (the population of the community). Then volunteer organizations must retain the member through "meaningful" incentives in order to motivate and maintain the volunteer's commitment and participation (Snook and Olsen, 1989).

Maslows Theory

In the early 1950's, Professor Abraham H. Maslow published research pertaining to human needs and motivation. Professor Maslow identified five human needs and prioritized them in order of importance as they relate to human motivational theory. Placed into a pyramid matrix, the first of the so-called "Hierarchy of Needs" was identified as Basic Physiological Needs (defined as the need for those things that provide for human survival). The second needs identified in the matrix are referred to as Safety and Security Needs. Closely linked to basic physiological needs, safety and security needs are simple and not unlike the basic physiological needs, ensure individual well being. Belonging and Social Activity made up the third tier of Maslow's pyramid. The need to socialize, being part of a larger group, is considered by some the last of the "basic" or lower human needs. The final two levels of human need identified by Maslow require a belief in the assumption that there are basic human desires for self-improvement and knowledge. The human desire to achieve recognition and rewards and to be

able to bestow them upon others was labeled by Maslow as Esteem and Status Needs. The final human need presented by Maslow is the need for Self-realization and Fulfillment. These higher needs may only be achieved once the four previous human needs have been met by a person's employment, home situation, or more commonly a combination of both (Didactic Systems, 1977).

Unlike the paid or career department, the volunteer organization must rely on outside sources to fulfill the basic human desires outlined by Maslow. Since a person's employment (outside the realm of his or her volunteerism) should meet the basic "Physiological" and "Safety" needs, the volunteer organization routinely focuses on the so called higher needs of "Socializing", "Ego" and "Self-fulfillment" (Snook, 1988). The volunteer fire department has long been recognized for its social climate and family orientation. In many areas of the country, the volunteer fire department is the social center of the community. Similarly, the very nature of the fire service routinely meets the "ego" needs of self-esteem and recognition. Only the best of the volunteer organizations go on to assist the volunteer with their creative and personal growth needs, the primary factors identified by Maslow for "Self-actualization" (Gratz, 1979, p. 204). With educational opportunities, promotion (with added roles and responsibilities), and job enhancement/enrichment, fire departments nurture and develop the individual's need for self-actualization.

Incentive Types

Without saying, most emergency service volunteers join for ". . . excitement, the opportunity to save lives, for challenge and recognition, a chance to contribute to the community and learn new skills, and for social involvement and camaraderie" (Marinucci, 1995, p.906). Incentives must be designed to motivate over the long term. While some incentives involve the

direct payment of monies to the volunteer (on-call pay, training pay, etc.), Snook and Olsen (1989) claim “there is NO evidence that per call compensation positively or negatively affects a department’s ability to recruit, train, or maintain volunteers or the quality of service provided” (p. 236). Other incentives can be divided into those that have a profound monetary impact on a department’s budget or those that are free or are very inexpensive. Under the broad category of costly incentives are items such as paid call and/or training, tuition assistance or reimbursement programs, paid health insurance and retirement or “Length of Service” awards (Garza, 1991). A few examples of inexpensive or free incentives include use of station equipment, i.e. copier, laundry/shower facilities, phone/fax, computers, etc., and informal rewards such as praise, acknowledgement, and awards (Snook and Olsen, 1989).

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

A desired outcome of this applied research project was to first define a volunteer incentive plan. This was accomplished by a review of current management texts and journals as well as a review of current literature regarding volunteerism recruitment and retention. Once the information was compiled, those necessary components of a volunteer incentive plan were identified and incorporated into a survey instrument (see Appendix A). The survey, with a cover letter, was distributed to 238 agencies identified by the Alaska State Fire Marshals office as having a volunteer fire department. Of the 238 surveys sent out, 79 were returned. Of those, 11 were removed from the sample as non-responsive or incomplete, leaving 68 valid surveys for a 29% return rate. Of those returning valid surveys, 74% were “pure” (receiving no pay or compensation for their participation on responses) volunteer departments compared to 26% that compensated their volunteers for going on calls.

Limitations

Although the number of returned surveys was relatively small, the sample size remains valid due to the nature of the volunteer department in Alaska. In an interview with David Tyler, Political Liaison with the Alaska State Fire Chief’s Association, it was explained that many of the agencies listed within the directory furnished by the Alaska State Fire Marshal’s office were in effect non-existent or were so loosely organized that any input from them would have been invalid and/or inaccurate for the purposes of this research (personal communication, May 1998). In fact, those surveys returned and removed from the sample included similar statements directly from those villages, or communities queried. Limited, as it was, the sample was representative of

volunteer incentives offered to 1,759 volunteer fire and EMS providers from across all regions of Alaska.

RESULTS

A sample of the survey instrument with percentile results is included in Appendix B.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. It is clear from a review of the literature that there are widely varying views of what a volunteer incentive program actually is. Marinucci (1995) states “. . . members want recognition for a job well done and a voice in the operations” (p. 912). Others believe that effective incentive programs require much more than recognition but rather a total commitment to the growth and development of the individual volunteer through training opportunities. In addition, by allowing the volunteer to assist the organization in reaching its goals and objectives and by meeting the individual needs of the volunteer within the framework of the department the volunteer can be encouraged to remain an active participant (Snook and Olsen, 1989). A volunteer incentive program therefore must be defined as any program that encourages, motivates, rewards and promotes volunteer retention and productivity.

Research Question 2. The necessary components of a volunteer incentive program are as varied as each individual and each agency, “The list of possible incentives is as long as a person’s ability to be creative” (Snook and Olsen, 1989, p. 235). Those incentives chosen by the agency must be meaningful to the individual or group of volunteers. Incentive programs should include portions from a long list of possibilities, including formal and informal rewards, recognition, and some form of monetary motivator (if customary or necessary for a particular area or region). Fire Chief John M. Buckman in the May 1998 issue of Fire Engineering identified several key components of both informal and formal rewards and recognition including: matching the reward to the person, matching the reward to the achievement, and being timely and specific in the reward. Financially strapped organizations can

focus on those incentives that cost very little or are free, while other departments can offer a better mix of both types of incentives. Again, the key is to match the reward (incentive) to the individual.

Research Question 3. As the results of the survey instrument were compiled, it became evident that the vast majority of volunteer departments in Alaska offer free training to their volunteers (94%). Surprisingly, the second most offered incentives were “informal” rewards, which included simple praise and acknowledgement (72%). The third greatest incentive offered was the use of the fire department facility (67%) which included use of the building and department owned tools for maintenance of personal vehicles, use of shower and laundry facilities, use of office equipment and machines, and access to potable water. Understanding that much of Alaska is rural or remote, such facility availability is a very meaningful reward/incentive. This incentive decreases in importance with the size and urbanization of the department and its membership. Very few volunteer departments, in contrast, offer either health insurance or retirement incentives (1%). These were most often limited to those agencies that were affiliated with a borough-wide system or an organized and funded Fire Service Area which could benefit from economies of scale and a tax revenue base. Likewise, less than half of the departments responding to the questionnaire report that they provide free meals or food vouchers (14%), family oriented events or training (35%), formal awards (41%), or length of service awards (38%). Just slightly more than half provide uniforms, which may have been limited to just caps or tee shirts (58%), or volunteer banquets or picnics (57%).

Additional Survey Answers. One important component of the survey included a breakdown of the tenure of the volunteer members of each organization. Not surprisingly, the vast majority (34%) of the 1,759 volunteers had been on the job less than 3 years. What was

unusual was the breakdown of the remainder of the volunteers. One could assume that there would be a progressive decline for the remaining numbers of volunteers corresponding to the volunteer's years-of-service. On the contrary, second leading tenure for emergency responders was the over 10 year group (21%), followed then by the 3 – 5 year group (17%), the 7 – 10 year group (16%) and finally the 5 – 7 year group (11%). The survey respondents were fairly split as to whether they felt the their volunteer incentives promoted the retention of their agency's volunteers (47% yes, 53% no). In contrast, 63% of the respondents had the opinion that volunteer incentives impacted operations, compared to only 37% that did not.

DISCUSSION

Most managers or directors of volunteer organizations have come to realize that the best way to ensure adequate participation is to offer rewards and recognition to its volunteers. The volunteer fire service has relied too long on the “men’s club” mentality to recruit and retain its workforce. Where once the volunteer department could recruit from word of mouth or through an informal exchange at the corner barbershop they can no longer. With a continuous change in the pool of available volunteers, fire departments and other volunteer agencies are discovering people just have less discretionary time. Potential causes have been identified as more women (a common resource for EMS recruits) entering the workforce, multiple job families, less blue-collar employment (another “traditional” supplier of emergency service volunteers) and just plain apathy. Fire departments, if they wish to remain voluntary, must learn to compete with other agencies vying for the same person’s commitment.

Though the rewards remain relatively the same, (feelings of accomplishment, achievement, etc.) the role of volunteer firefighter has dramatically been altered during the past decade. Professional fire organizations (volunteer or paid) must fulfill a wide variety of obligations: fire suppression, risk reduction, rescue, emergency medical services, public education/injury prevention, etc. with the same or a decreasing number of available human resources. Combined with government regulated or mandated training requirements, many volunteers are making the decision to quit emergency services altogether. Potential volunteers, after learning about the time commitment requirements of the fire service, often opt for another less time consuming avenue for their desires. Either this human resource void must be filled by paid personnel, additional volunteers (that have to be recruited and trained), or there must be a significant reduction in the quality or scope of services offered. In many cases, the public

expectation of immediate, professional response and mitigation can no longer be met by the volunteer organization.

One method found to reduce the turnover of trained and experienced responders is by the use of volunteer incentive programs. Whether formal and costly or very informal and inexpensive, research coupled with anecdotal evidence indicates that incentives indeed do lead to additional years of service for emergency responders. The goal for any fire department chief or administrator should be to determine which incentives will work for their organization and to implement them within the constraints set by budget or organizational climate realizing that the alternatives may be much more costly. Many volunteer organization do not have the option to go to a paid or career system, “In order to ensure the continued viability of the volunteer fire service, it is important to explore how to provide adequate benefits to the professional volunteers” (Buckman and Windisch, July 1, 1996).

Much information was gathered from the survey sent to volunteer fire departments within Alaska. While much of the information was anecdotal in the form of handwritten notes on the returned forms, much can also be extrapolated from the numbers. One could expect, from basic human nature, that every volunteer agency would offer praise and acknowledgement to its members. Surprisingly, only 72% of those departments returning questionnaires offered those “informal rewards”. What should be as common as a thank-you for a job well done is not given to almost 30% of the volunteer firefighters serving Alaskan communities or villages. The correlation also cannot go unnoticed between those surveys returned with comments such as: “we don’t need incentives here”, and “incentives aren’t important” with high percentages of low tenure members (over 75% of the total membership with less than 5 years of active service). There were also some bright spots within the volunteer agencies represented. Almost 90% of

those asked responded that they would like to see the results of the survey, indicating that at least the issues of volunteer incentives have their attention. The various comments received are reprinted in their entirety under “Comments” located in Appendix C.

In comparison, the City of Homer offers most of the incentives listed in the questionnaire though in many cases not in sufficient quantity to be successful. With the exception of health insurance or any type of a pension system, the Homer Volunteer Fire Department provides its membership with a wide range of incentives. In addition to those listed, the department recently instituted a tuition assistance program to active volunteers that can pay for up to half the cost of acquiring an associates degree through the local college. Where the department is most lacking is in the use of informal awards, “A sincere word of thanks from the right person at the right time can mean more than a raise, a formal award, or a whole wall of certificates or plaques”

(Buckman, July 1998, p. 8).

Based on the findings of the questionnaire, the Homer Volunteer Fire Department may be at a crossroads. While a number of the more seasoned members of the organization are resistant to the idea of pay for calls and training, many of the newer members have expressed favor if such were the case. If the time of the pure volunteer system is at its end in Homer, the transition to a paid on-call or paid call system may offer the solution to the retention situation. In contrast, if such a pay system is developed, there may be a risk of alienating and potentially losing a handful of productive experienced volunteers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research conducted it is apparent that the Homer Volunteer Fire Department is no worse off than other departments within the state. In fact the department exceeds the number of volunteers, tenure of volunteers and volunteer incentives offered by all but a few of the volunteer departments in the state when compared to departments with similar run volume, population served and jurisdiction size.

The next logical step in the process of developing a formal volunteer incentive program would be to question the current membership about the importance they place on the various incentives. If the volunteer system, as it now exists, is salvageable there must be clear, measurable, and realistic criteria established for a volunteer incentive plan and its implementation. The City of Homer must also be encouraged to continue with its plans to expand the scope of volunteer incentives to possibly include health and retirement benefits, even to the point of extending those benefits to a member's spouse and dependent(s). The entire membership of HVFD must also be kept abreast of the issue and remain informed and participatory in the decisions to be made.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Chief or Administrator,

I am conducting a survey of all the volunteer fire departments in the state to determine which types of volunteer incentives are offered by each department. It is hoped that we can build an incentive program in Homer that will not only help us retain skilled responders but to maintain the same level of enthusiasm and energy they have as they begin their emergency service careers with us.

This project is being conducted as part of an Applied Research Project of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your honest and complete answers will be formulated into a research paper and applied to the Homer Volunteer Fire Department. Your assistance in the completion of this project is greatly appreciated. Please return the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope before June 20, 1998.

Robert L. Painter
Assistant Chief

Volunteer Incentive Questionnaire

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions regarding your agency's incentives. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Once the questionnaire is complete please return in the self-addressed and stamped envelope.

AGENCY NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ **ZIP CODE:** _____

PHONE: _____ - _____ - _____

PERSON COMPLETING QUESTIONNAIRE: _____

TITLE: _____

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS? _____ **NUMBER OF PAID STAFF?** _____

1. Do your volunteers receive any compensation (standby pay, call pay, etc.) for their participation on responses? **Yes**_____ **No**_____ **If so, please describe on reverse**
2. How many calls or responses does your agency handle annually? _____
3. From the list below, please place a check mark next to those volunteer incentives that your agency provides for your volunteers.

- _____ Training at no or reduced cost to the volunteer/member
- _____ Uniforms (including tee-shirts, jackets etc.)
- _____ Facility usage (office equipment, fax, computer, laundry, water etc.)
- _____ Health Insurance coverage (individual and/or family)
- _____ Retirement/Pension Plan
- _____ Formal Awards (Achievement or otherwise)
- _____ Free Meals/food vouchers (either in-station or from local vendors)
- _____ Passes to area attractions (movies, arcades, skiing, swimming, gym, etc.)
- _____ Paid or reimbursed travel for educational purposes
- _____ Family oriented events/training
- _____ Volunteer banquets/picnics
- _____ Length of Service Awards
- _____ Promotion/rank with length of service or training
- _____ Informal Rewards (praise, acknowledgement, etc.)
- _____ **Other**, Please specify on reverse

4. How many of your volunteers have been with your department less than 3 years? _____, more than three but less than 5 years? _____, more than 5 years but less than 7 years? _____, more than seven years but less than 10 years? _____, and how many more than 10 years? _____.
5. In your opinion, do your volunteer incentives allow you to keep your volunteers longer?
_____ **Yes**, _____ **No**.
6. In your opinion, have volunteer incentives, or the lack of, impacted your operations?
_____ **Yes**, _____ **No**, **please explain in detail below**.

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. Your honest answers may help us build a useful incentive program for our department. Would you like to see the results of this survey? _____ Yes, _____ No.

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX B

Volunteer Incentive Questionnaire

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions regarding your agency's incentives. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Once the questionnaire is complete please return in the self-addressed and stamped envelope.

AGENCY NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ **ZIP CODE:** _____

PHONE: _____ - _____ - _____

PERSON COMPLETING QUESTIONNAIRE: _____

TITLE: _____

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS? 1759

NUMBER OF PAID STAFF? _____

1. Do your volunteers receive any compensation (standby pay, call pay, etc.) for their participation on responses? **Yes** 26% **No** 74% **If so, please describe on reverse**
7. How many calls or responses does your agency handle annually? _____
8. From the list below, please place a check mark next to those volunteer incentives that your agency provides for your volunteers.

- 94%** Training at no or reduced cost to the volunteer/member
- 58%** Uniforms (including tee-shirts, jackets etc.)
- 67%** Facility usage (office equipment, fax, computer, laundry, water etc.)
- 1%** Health Insurance coverage (individual and/or family)
- <1%** Retirement/Pension Plan
- 41%** Formal Awards (Achievement or otherwise)
- 14%** Free Meals/food vouchers (either in-station or from local vendors)
- <1%** Passes to area attractions (movies, arcades, skiing, swimming, gym, etc.)
- 62%** Paid or reimbursed travel for educational purposes
- 35%** Family oriented events/training
- 57%** Volunteer banquets/picnics
- 38%** Length of Service Awards
- 18%** Promotion/rank with length of service or training
- 72%** Informal Rewards (praise, acknowledgement, etc.)
- 12%** **Other**, Please specify on reverse

9. How many of your volunteers have been with your department less than 3 years? **34%**, more than three but less than 5 years? **17%**, more than 5 years but less than 7 years? **11%**, more than seven years but less than 10 years? **16%**, and how many more than 10 years? **21%**.
10. In your opinion, do your volunteer incentives allow you to keep your volunteers longer?
47% Yes, 53% No.
11. In your opinion, have volunteer incentives, or the lack of, impacted your operations? **63% Yes, 37% No, please explain in detail below.**

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. Your honest answers may help us build a useful incentive program for our department. Would you like to see the results of this survey? _____ Yes, _____ No.

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX C

COMMENTS

The following comments are taken from those received from the Comments section of the Volunteer Incentive Questionnaire. They are edited for spelling only.

The one's that stay, are the one's who like to do it for fun and to help their neighbors and friends in time of emergency needs.

We are very fortunate at this point in time. I think that the volunteers we have now are dedicated to the job regardless of incentive. The only incentive we offer as legitimate incentives are two tee-shirts per volunteer and ridiculous amounts of praise, supplemented by hearty slaps on the back.

Our volunteers are all local homeowners. They volunteer to protect their own property.

Can't keep them anyway we try. Too, damn many calls for a little department. Some burn out slower than others.

I was on a big department in Arizona, they had good incentives for the volunteers. Discounts at movies, free movie passes, nice dinners, all kinds of stuff usually donated by local business.

They had a great medical and dental plan, all training paid. However more than half the roster was dead weight, just came to the minimum amount of required training and never responded to a call unless it was a barn burner and that left the rest of us with the brunt of calls. But every

month when they had the drawing for winners of the monthly awards (movies, free rentals, dinners for two) guess who usually won. Something to think about.

The volunteers need to be recognized for their efforts and commitment or the results will be less interest in being a volunteer and possibly not showing for calls.

A dedicated volunteer is dedicated regardless of incentives, but it's just a nice way of saying thank you and letting them know we appreciate them.

Volunteers thrive on being needed. The more you request their assistance (even for small “nothing type” calls) the more they want to learn and do. Awards and picnics help them to get to know each other on a personal level – but sometimes these events are poorly attended compared to a “call” or a great working drill.

The lack of incentives is why no one is interested in being a volunteer. No one has any training other than myself and that was 13 years ago.

Volunteer incentives do not increase length of service. However, all volunteers appreciate recognition.

You got me thinking about what we can do for our people. This form will go to the board for ideas and implementation. Thanks.

Incentives are important but can't and shouldn't be the primary factor in retention. The best volunteers are those who serve for the satisfaction of helping their community and a job well done. The worst volunteers are those motivated only by the perks/incentives. Obviously, most volunteers fall somewhere between those extremes. So there is a place for incentives. The value of informal rewards shouldn't be underestimated. A simple thanks is easy to say but it seems like a difficult thing for many people to say.

I believe that the impact area is just recognizing them for the effort they put out for the community. Every year we have a banquet where different people come to thank the volunteers for what they do. We also give out plaques and awards at this function.

For awhile the incentives work, however the longer the volunteer stay the less the incentives are of importance. Involvement of family, community and department functions seem to increase when members stay longer.

Incentives help to keep more volunteers active. Especially for training (free of charge) and meetings (we give door prizes but still have low attendance). But during an actual fire more volunteers show up anyway.